Within and Without the Church

Rev. J. Laxenaire

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Within and Without the Church.

BY

REV. J. LAXENAIRE.

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PREFACE.

To be or not to be within the pale of the true Church is a most important question for us, since upon its solution depends the eternal future of our soul.

From the very idea of truth we deduce that there can be only one true Church: as good is diametrically opposed to evil, so the true is essentially in contradiction with the false, and this divergence is an absolute necessity.

From the very words of Christ also, we must conclude that there is only one true Church. "Hear the Church," He said, not "the churches." Upon this rock I will build my Church," not "my churches." "There shall be *one* fold," not a hundred, nor a thousand, "and *one* shepherd." This Church of Christ is "the congregation of all the faithful who, being baptized, profess the same faith, partake of the same sacraments, worship God with

the same sacrifice, and are governed by their lawful pastors under one visible head."

Logically speaking, only one Church can fulfill these conditions. Legions of denominations, however, blooming as mushrooms after a rainy night, claim to be the church of Christ.

In this flood of pretenses, where is the truth? Sane criticism comes to our assistance, saying: The Church that proves to be the first Christian church necessarily is the true one. Christ founded His Church in the year 33. Which of the churches of our day asserts having been established at that time?

Fortified with an unbroken succession of pontiffs going back to Peter and from him to Christ, the Church one, holy, catholic, apostolic can answer: "Adsum."

Vainly and ridiculously the other churches claim apostolic succession. The Lutheran church, for instance, cannot go back further than to Martin Luther, a refractory monk and infamous priest. The birthday of the Anglican or the Epis-

copalian church is in the reign of Henry VIII, a voluptuous king, who broke with Rome because it would not grant him a divorce from his lawful wife. Presbyterianism goes back only to John Knox, Methodism only to John Wesley, the religion of the Quakers only to George Fox, of the Anabaptists only to Nicholas Stork. The founder of Christian Science, Mrs. Eddy, is still living. I do not here speak of the Church of Mr. Dowie, because it is not right to mix ludicrous reminiscences with serious subjects.

Now these men and this woman, founders of churches, had no more right than you or I, to establish a new Church. The true religion must have God only as its foundation and support. The Roman Catholic Church alone goes back to the Christ-God, therefore she alone is the true Church.

This is the *thesis*, but on account of the possibility of good faith everywhere, on account of the possibility of certitude founded on error, there is an *antithesis* — the unity of religion has to be conciliated

with the dignity of consciences. With the Catholic theory of the body and soul of the Church Dr. Laxenaire is to make up for us the *synthesis*.

We are usually more ignorant than weak, we need more light than strength, let us, then, study his work.

J. M. LELEU.

TROY, N. Y., March 31st, 1904.

CHAPTER I.

What is the Church?

The divine person of Jesus Christ dominates everything in the world, men and events.

History is divided in two parts, before Christ and after Christ. The life of the God-man, therefore, is more than a date, it is an epoch, the beginning of the era we call Christian. Even those who do not see the transcendental side of this physiognomy, give to Him daily an unwilling homage; they cannot date a letter without acknowledging that all the ages set out from Him and that He has displaced the center of gravity of the world.

What is the end of this divine manifestation which Saint Augustine calls "the ecstasy of the mind and heart of God?" Leaving the ninety-nine faithful sheep, the

Son of God came to seek the lost, — humanity which had gone astray. He rescued it from ignorance and evil and so merited the name of Saviour. But redemption is only a part of the divine plan. Christ came also to call mankind to a life higher, more intellectual and moral; He proposed a higher ideal, the ideal of the Gospel.

It is indeed a general law of nature that a superior being draws to itself an inferior: life in its operations employs matter, the intellect uses physical and psychical forces, the brain becomes the noble instrument of spiritual power: the teacher awakes in a pupil the life of mind and heart, so that a real communion of ideas and sentiments unites master and scholar.

Why should not God be able to do for mankind what life and intellect do for matter, and man does for his fellow-being?

We Catholics believe that God has realized this exalted ideal by giving to us through the Incarnation supernatural life, and we hold that this gift far from weakening our natural endowment gives satisfaction to the most intimate and most pro-

found aspirations of human nature, and even to the most exacting demands of the philosophy of the twentieth century.

What does the philosophy of our day establish but the craving we have for life, for life unbroken, for life even unto the infinite? To develop all the faculties of being and of action to the highest point, to be, to act, to live the most we can, such is "the make-up of desire and life that springs from matter into conscience?"

Now the Gospel, the code of the supernatural, is not only a calling to life, a continual excitant to being and progress, it is also an urgent invitation to give higher moral value to life. And grace, the special form of the supernatural, is a complement and enlargement which the progress of our will demands and requires, in place of repelling; this gift offered by God to man is an application of the principle of the association whose excellence and fecundity nobody disputes.

The elect are those who accept this assistance of God and co-operate with it to improve their life and establish therein the ideal of the Gospel.

In Holy Writ, indeed, the word "elect" has a double meaning; chosen and deserving to be chosen. It does not signify "burnt-out spirits or corpses of souls." As the word itself indicates, elect means a selection. In this selection there is a hierarchy at the head of which are found those we call saints and to whom we offer public veneration.

In them grace did not extinguish any light nor kill any energy. As in an organism the living principle does not alter the combining of chemical molecules, but superintends their evolution according to the type of perfection to be realized, so the supernatural life does not violate the autonomy peculiar to a free being.

If it mortifies the passions it is to subdue their living forces and direct them to the development of the superior life of the spirit.

Grace which makes the elect, does not break the unity of the human person; because notwithstanding the transcendency of the supernatural, it penetrates human personality, and the whole moral activity

is only a manifestation of the same identical life. Besides, where do you find lives more united than those of our great saints, in whom all faculties are subordinated to the central energy they obey?

The elect then, are really the perfect men of whom a certain philosophy dreamed and the supernatural Christian is for mankind an apotheosis, mysterious, indeed, but the only one which does not end in the dreams of pantheism or in the immobility of the Buddhist nirvana.

God has not only individualized human nature in Himself; but He unites Himself by grace to every human being: Jesus Christ calls all men, from the child of the slums to the scientist of the university, to incarnate in their life according to their capacity the ideal which He, Himself, has lived and which has never been surpassed, in order to mould all men to His likeness, or in the sublime words of St. Paul "until we all meet into the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ." (Eph. IV, 13.)

To perfect this work it was necessary that Jesus Christ be proof against death and live in the heart of humanity. Hence He founded not simply a religion, but a religious society, — a distinction that must be kept in mind, since a society is the natural path which leads all intelligent beings to their normal development. Christ founded this society, not that each member should work as an isolated unit to moral perfection, but that all should be and form one body whose head is the "Great Uniter" as St. Francis de Sales calls the Saviour.

Let us glance at the composition of this society known as the Church. There is nothing which cannot be considered from two points of view; the formal and material principle, the visible and invisible element; theologians, therefore, distinguish between the soul and the body of the Church. These terms need explanation.

In every living being there is a principle of life. In mankind and the brute creation it is called soul. Moulding the body and communicating being and life, the soul gives to the composite its peculiar char-

acter, its specific type; as "the directive idea" it presides over the harmonious development of the body and the complicated play of the vital functions.

By analogy a moral body or society is said to have a body and soul. The body are the members who constitute its visible element; the soul is the idea or the principle which gives life to the society, bestows upon it a peculiar physiognomy, makes it a being morally one. Consequently the body of the Church are the members who fulfil the three fundamental conditions imposed by Jesus Christ, that is to say those who believe the same revealed truths, — at least through a general belief — receive the same sacraments and obey the same head.

As to the soul of the Church, it is not like the human soul, a substance apart; nor does it consist, as it has been asserted, in the congregation of the just, for the members, the body, of a society cannot be its soul; nor is the Holy Ghost the soul of the Church. He is only its generative principle — hence the article of the Apos-

tles' Creed—"I believe in the Holy Ghost" is immediately followed by the article "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church."

What, then, is the soul of the Church? It is the divine element which animates her — sanctifying grace manifested especially by charity. That intrinsic ideal is the principle of the life and development of the Church, and, though invisible in itself, it penetrates through the imperfections and hardness of the body to make its light shine. And as in an organism, the soul is the inner architect which raises the vital edifice and arranges the materials according to the influence of the "directive idea" to be realized, so sanctifying grace is the active vivifying principle which builds up the City of God and sends life into every part of the vast organism of the Church.

The Church, therefore, is not a "walking theorem" nor a system of inflated consequences long drawn out; it is in fact a living organism whose life is as real and tangible as that of the individual.

Now in every vital tendency there is, as Auguste Comte says, a permanent static

element or principle of perseverance with a dynamic element or principle of progress operating by internal impulsion. Such, indeed, is the Catholic Church. In her internal structure she remains immutable, since Christ with divine hand, traced her essential form. Hence it is not possible to admit with Harnack[1] that her external organization, so far as it pertains to what is essential to her composition, can be the product of human factors and the term of a slow, progressive evolution.

The conclusion, however, must not be drawn that the Church is unchangeable and petrified: for like all created life, she encloses within herself a variable and changeable element susceptible of perfection. To live, indeed, is to change, to exercise perfectibility.

So the ancient Creed of Apostolic days is unaltered, remaining ever the same, whether on the lips of people of modern times or in pages venerable with the dust of antiquity. But there is nothing of the fixity of mummies wrapt in bandlets as M.

[1] Outlines of the History of Dogma, pag. 53.

Sabatier lately charged. For, following the law of the process of life, the divine seed committed to the soil germinates, the formulas of dogma reveal more and more their wealth and truths until now enveloped in shadow, gradually emerge to the light. This, indeed, is progress.

And in the practical order, Christian life always the same in its essential laws, expands into new forms, and the Church accommodating herself to the exigencies of the country and the demands of the times, moulds the clay out of which new societies and governments are made.

Thus is diversified *ad infinitum* the eternal movement by which the divine Workman gathers the elect—a movement showing forth by pliant action a vitalizing power and a vigor emanating from perpetual youth. Knowing that her mission is not to keep guard over cemeteries where sleep the dead, but to communicate life about her to souls of good will, the "Sublime Traveler," as Bossuet calls the Church, goes forth along the unknown way which the divine hand has marked out for

her. And asking only a clear passage here below, she daily gathers a harvest of elect and leads them to heaven, the home of the Father of the great human family.

CHAPTER II.

Is There Salvation Outside the Church?

Jesus Christ pronounced these solemn words: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man cometh to the Father but by Me." (John XIV, 6.) And that admirable little book the *Imitation of Christ* thus interprets the saying of the Master: "Without the Way you cannot go, without the Truth you cannot know, without the Life you cannot live." (Book the third, ch. LVI.)

In other words, there is no salvation outside the Church of Jesus Christ. This doctrine is as old as Christianity and truth itself. It is found in the writings of the first Fathers as well as in the Gospel. Origen appears to have been the first writer to use this expression which the Church has since made her own. On this point her thought never varied, but she

applied it to each epoch according to the needs of the times. Sometimes she laid greater stress upon it, for instance when those separated from her were less excusable. Again, without concealing or diminishing the truth, she did not proclaim this point with the same energy and solemnity, in order not to distress consciences of good faith.

Regret is permissible, perhaps, that so concise a formulary, excellent, indeed, for theologians, should have become a common expression in popular teaching; for if it is rigorously true, it needs to be clarified by precise explanations for the benefit of the uninstructed who are inclined to accept literally whatever they hear. The expression, "no salvation outside the Church," nevertheless is one of purest orthodoxy, it is not, as Rousseau says, "a scare-crow to frighten Catholics into allegiance and keep them from going into other denominations."

Protestants themselves,[1] who make it a

[1] Here is the text of the Anglican confession, as quoted by Rev. F. Dublanchy, in his great

crime for Catholics to use this formulary, employed it in their "Confessions" defined from 1530 to 1560. Since then, the meaning of the phrase had been modified according to the spirit and tendencies of particular sects, but the substance of the doctrine has been kept. The Anglican church, for instance, still teaches that there is no salvation without faith in Jesus Christ; so, too, the Methodist church insists. But whatever shadow of true faith remains in Protestants, are they not from a doctrinal point of view, intolerant towards deists as these are towards atheists?

For this formulary is the expression of good sense itself. He who has said, "I am the Truth" has founded a religious society which guards the deposit of His

work, page 384, "De axiomate Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus" a thesis of doctorate, held in 1896, before the theological faculty of the Catholic University of Washington. "Sunt et illi anathematizandi qui dicere audent unumquemque in lege aut secta quam profitetur esse servandum, modo juxta illam et lumen natura accurate vixerit, cum sacrae littera tantum Jesu Christi nomen prodicent in quo salvos fieri homines oportet." Cfr. Burnet, Oxford, 1831. Preface, p. XX.

teaching and, as a consequence, the deposit of truth. Now every truth, every affirmation necessarily is the negation of the contrary — it is based upon the principle of contradiction — a principle that is the keystone of all our knowledge. He has also said: "I am the Way." Now every way, by the very fact of being a way, excludes everything that is not itself. Outside this way we may walk and become fatigued, but we cannot possibly reach the goal. He has also declared: "I am the Life." Now every life is regulated by certain laws that are fatally intolerant. Their violation implies a disorder and forfeiture which lead to ruin and death. What living being can subsist if it spurns the essential constitutive laws which govern it? But the fundamental law placed by the Supreme Legislator at the base of Christian society is: "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned." (Mark XVI, 16.)

Let us develop this truth. All legislation whatsoever, and hence the Gospel itself, can become obligatory only after suffi-

cient promulgation: how can a dogma or a commandment impose an obligation on the conscience of a Hottentot who never heard of it? But that is not all. The law in question is a penal law. Dreadful is the punishment which follows its transgression. Now a penal law can strike only the guilty and culpability presupposes not only the fact of the violation of the law, but also the wilful fault, that is to say, the intention which alone gives morality to the act. This is a truism. But there is an involuntary infidelity which, like any error of good faith, does not affect the conscience in any way. The most elementary justice requires that nobody be made responsible for false judgments against which it was impossible to guard, and for errors which are only "false steps on the road to truth." Those alone are amenable to the divine sentence therefore, who knowingly shut their eyes to the light and wilfully repel the truth. This is in keeping with the dictates of good sense which according to Bossuet is "the master of human life" and whose directions in the formation of our

judgment must always be considered. We stigmatize the man who in public or private life gives the lie to his convictions, forces his conscience to bow before interest or caprice, or repels the truth simply because it imposes duties or sacrifices upon him.

Good faith then is here the supreme judge from whose decision there is no appeal. He therefore who is of good faith in error, is innocent of wrong as long as his good faith lasts; once he ceases to be of good faith he is guilty. Hence the Church always respecting true liberty of conscience, does not receive those to come to her unless they offer to her the proof of reasoned conviction and of an adhesion founded upon her teachings.

Rousseau is then simply ridiculous when he sheds crocodile tears over the fate of that "good old man, pious and philanthropic, a seeker only for the truth who was eternally punished on account of the laziness of the Apostles."[1] The fate of men in eternity is not a matter of chronology or geography: it is a question of in-

[1] Emile, b. IV, p. 363.

terior dispositions. From a religious or any other point of view, birth, perhaps, may be an inferiority, but it can never be a crime. Nobody is lost for having been ignorant of what he could not know, or for having failed to do what to him was impossible of execution.

Must we conclude then, that there are elect or saved outside the Church? No, and here is the reason. The normal conditions of salvation are found in the Church to which Jesus Christ gave the two greatest agents of sanctification — integral truth and the sacraments. But after the institution of the Church as before its establishment, God employed other means of salvation: by His direct action which is independent of exterior causes, He can call and sanctify souls of good will. And when by a personal effort they correspond to this interior grace, they no longer are outside the Church: they belong in fact to the soul of the Church since they have sanctifying grace: by desire (*in voto* the theologians say) they belong even to the body, since the good will which we suppose in them

contains implicitly the desire of incorporation with the Church, the only society founded by Jesus Christ to lead mankind to their destiny. These souls, then, lead the life of the Church, although they are not fully established in the order required by God. They are, in the words of Monsabré, "so many flowers opening in an atmosphere wherein they inhale the perfume of the Church." [1]

It may be objected that this doctrine is a damper to the zeal of missionaries who at the cost of heroic sacrifice labor to extend the frontiers of the Church. If pagans can enter the Church and be saved without such a ministry what is the use of self-sacrifice in spreading the Gospel?

It is true that He who gives to the apostolate all its efficacy can disclose Himself to souls and speak directly to hearts; missionaries may then apply to themselves the words of the Gospel: "We are only useless servants." But there remains to them as a reward for their sacrifices the double glory of being ambassadors of God

[1] Monsabré, The Other World, p. 33.

and of being engaged in the noble work of opening to human beings the way of truth; their corpses will serve as stepping stones for the rise of Christian civilization. Besides if salvation is possible outside the body of the Church, it is more difficult. The mind possesses neither integral truth nor infallible teaching, the will misses a wealth of assistance, as the sacraments and external worship.

Join to this the impossibility of measuring the degree of good faith, even if we suppose it exists in a great number outside the Church. "Never," wrote Count de Maistre, "will we cease to hope for good faith in all, never, too, will we cease to tremble at the thought that God alone knows the true condition." Nothing, then, is more urgent than to multiply for all, the means of salvation, This, indeed, is the spirit of the Syllabus which condemns the proposition. — "We must hope well for the salvation of those who do not live in the Catholic Church." [1]

From all this, it is evident that the soul of the Church has a greater field than the

[1] Syllabus, Propositio 17.

body. Like the soul of every living creature, it tends to attract to itself elements which are susceptible of assimilation and to incorporate them in the organism which it vivifies. It, therefore, extends beyond the body. It resembles indeed the ocean which by invisible arteries penetrates beyond its boundaries into a continent. "Many of those who seem outside the Church," wrote St. Augustine, "are really within, and many who appear within are actually outside." Tertullian, too, speaks of those outside the Church who are Christians unknown to themselves. So despite the party-walls of religions there is true communion of spirits and hearts.

The Catholic Church, then, is not a heathen pantheon open to all the winds of doctrine, nor is it a caste, closed to all who are not initiated in its rites and formularies. It is truly a religion "in spirit and in truth" whose Founder died while extending his arms over the world and whose Chief from the dust of the Catacombs or under golden vestments, blesses its sons known and unknown of the City and the World. — Urbi et Orbi.

CHAPTER III.

The Eternal Future of Infants.

It is one of the merits of positivism to have formulated the two laws which place man in the net of influences in which he is continually enveloped. We receive a first series of influences which connect us with our ancestors: that is the law of continuity of which the Catholic dogma of original sin s an application. Dominated by our forefathers we also come under the law of solidarity by the influence received from our contemporaries.

These ideas which palpitate in the brain of modern society shed a bright light on the Chrisfian doctrine of the eternal future of children.

To reach heaven, as we have said before, the child must be incorporated in the Church, or in the strong language of St. Paul, "must put on Christ"[1] for Holy

[1] Galat. III, 27.

Writ declares there is no other Saviour for mankind. And just as the child is joined to the family and to civil society by the act of the parents, so by them he must enter into religious society: they must by a special act accept for him the benefit of the Redemption. He is absolutely incapable of a personal act, while they alone on account of their relation to him, are qualified to act in his name.

Since the origin of the Church, the means of regeneration of children has been put into the hands of parents. Holy Writ testifies many times that Christ died for all (Rom. VIII, 32) and that God will have all men to be saved (I Tim. II, 4). Theologians almost unanimously apply these words to children. On the other hand it is certain that if God wills their salvation, He must furnish to them the means of attaining it. What is the means? In pre-Christian times it consisted principally in faith in the future Redeemer, the promise of whom was made by Almighty God near the cradle of the human race. This faith, whose nature we

shall explain in the next chapter, was to be expressed, we are led to believe, by an act of worship or an exterior sign, as a sacrifice, a prayer, a blessing. This means which parents had to use in behalf of their children, held its efficacy until the Christian era: it is probable that among the Jews it was replaced by the rite of circumcision, raised by God to the dignity of a sacrament and administered to boys at least eight days old. After the coming of Christ, baptism becomes the sacrament of regeneration. Its administration is made as easy as possible by the mercy of God — a few words pronounced by any person with the intention of doing what the Church does — while a few drops of water are poured upon the head: these two simple things carry supernatural life to the soul, almost as sound, which is a thing purely material, is the vehicle for thought and the life of the intellect.

Faith teaches us that baptism is absolutely necessary. Some authors claim to have found exceptions: some say that the mother's desire for the baptism of her

child constitutes the sacrament, as her negligence may compromise the salvation of the being she has just brought into the world. Dr. Schell of the University of Wurtzbourg [1] has been teaching lately that since the passion and death of Christ, suffering and death are a *quasi-sacrament* giving sanctifying grace.

But the precise definition of the Council of Trent (session VII, can. V) does not seem to admit these exceptions. The only exception which has a solid basis in the doctrine and practice of the Church is martyrdom. Nevertheless, when there is question of countries where the Gospel has not yet been promulgated, we cannot assert with the same assurance that children dying without baptism will be deprived of the happiness of heaven. The Church does not teach this and a large number of theologians believe that the ancient means of regeneration maintains its provisionary efficacy to the present time; a prominent review of France, *l'Ami du Clergé* (Sept. 21, 1899), gives this opinion as common doc-

[1] Dogmatik, b. III.

trine. The argument, indeed, is not peremptory on account of the very particular character of the law in question; still we cannot deny to it an important value.

Now comes the important question: What is the fate of those children who do not receive baptism, by the fault of their parents or for any other reason? Since the Council of Florence, it is of faith that such children are excluded from heaven. Does this mean that a decree of damnation strikes them as they awake to the realities of the other life? Are they the dead wood which God will cast into the fire? No, for they are free from personal sin: but they are condemned not to see the beatific vision. The Church does not teach anything beyond this, and we have to be on our guard against confounding her dogmatic teaching with the opinions of theologians. Some Fathers, under the influence of the ideas of the time, suppose that unbaptized children are in a state of suffering; but the spirit of the Church is more and more against this opinion.

What, therefore, is the fate reserved for

such children by Providence? We must understand before all, that the happiness of heaven is supernatural. To every intelligent creature that does not make itself unworthy of the favor, God is bound to grant a happiness in keeping with the legitimate and reasonable needs of its nature: the logic of the divine work demands such action.

But the eternal vision, "face to face," promised to mankind, transcends the needs and the wildest aspirations of human nature; to say the contrary would be to assert that the activity of God and man has the same natural term and consequently, that between the nature of the Creator and that of the creature there is no irreducible difference: that would be pure pantheism.

If some creatures do not reach the heights of heaven, they lose an inestimable favor, a priceless privilege; but God does not violate any of their rights. They have, indeed, a right to happiness, but not to that kind of happiness. They must be able to attain their end, that is to say, the

reasonable happiness resulting from the acquisition of the true and the accomplishment of the good. God is not obliged to give them anything more. The inequality of these benefits ought not to be considered an injustice, for divine wisdom presides over the distribution of its gifts, and in the plans which it unfolds, even dissonance and anomaly are adapted to the harmonious whole and final eurythmy. Order springs from disorder, as a work of art arises from the chaos of matter upon which an artist's thought operates.

The mitigated condition of unbaptized children makes us understand the better our elevation to the supernatural order, as those poor deformed creatures, the debris of humanity, whom we meet sometimes on our way, recall to our minds the priceless worth of those gifts we fail fully to appreciate.

In fine in this matter the goodness of God is not on trial, neither is His justice nor wisdom. Indeed, according to the idea of St. Thomas Aquinas, the greatest of theologians, these children enjoy spir-

itual blessings, real happiness undoubtedly resembling what we experience here below, when life is not darkened by suffering. And this happiness is infinitely better than nihility, for in spite of the trials of the present life, how few men, even among the most unhappy, truly wish to die! It is difficult, of course, to explain precisely the nature of that happiness. God whom St. Catherine of Siena calls the "Sweet First Truth" reveals Himself to those children, according to the angelical doctor, not in the intimacy and splendor of the vision, "face to face," but by the wonderful works of creation which discover to them something of the ideal beauty of its Author.

This happiness, in every way worthy of a rational being, is not disturbed by the prospect of the more blissful lot reserved for others, for happiness is essentially relative; it is the harmony between a creature and its natural craving; it consists, therefore, in the enjoyment of good in relation to the needs and aspirations of the creature. Would anyone dare assert, for instance, that the cowboy breathing the

pure air and enjoying his condition endures real suffering in feeling that he has not the opportunity of becoming president of a college? Who complains seriously of not having wings or of not being an angel? Now, from what has been said before, the heaven of the Elect is for man a happiness of which he can be made capable, but for which he does not naturally feel the need. Children, although they are deprived of heaven, can be happy and can thank Providence which called them into existence.

We may sum up this chapter in this common formulary: No one is lost, very many are saved, all are happy.

CHAPTER IV.

The Condition for Salvation of Adults.

There are adults whose intelligence vegetates in perpetual childhood. In eternity they will share the lot of infants, for they cannot assume the responsibility of a life fixed in the domain of unconsciousness. It seems that we can even say that many pagans are veritable children. Some savages are so stupid that they have been judged to belong to another species and it may be asked if they really comprehend the meaning of mortal sin. Is it not possible that their reason, developed enough, indeed, to satisfy the first necessities of life, is, in the religious and moral sense, in a state of real childhood? Possibly they also will be treated like children by the Sovereign Judge of human responsibilities. But it does not seem that we should so class the majority of pagans as St. George

Mivart has done.[1] Very many of them, though deprived of instruction, enjoy the complete use of reason and the plenitude of their natural faculties. We cannot, therefore, admit for them an intermediate state between heaven and hell, for God wills the salvation of all men and all are called to the supernatural state. Some day He will offer to them according to the plans of His Providence, the means to reach that state. If they correspond to grace, at least to the grace of prayer, they will take their place among the elect; if they remain deaf to the call of God, they make themselves guilty of personal sin. To us it appears impossible to believe that they die like infants, only with original sin, and that there is for them a final state of natural bliss resembling that of children.

Let us now see what are the conditions of salvation for adults.

As free creatures and masters of their destiny, they must direct their steps to

[1] Happiness in Hell. The Nineteenth Century. December 1892.

God. But before starting, one ought to know where to go and know also the goal of his journey. This, then, is the reason why God's intercourse with man which constitutes revealed religion begins by the call of God or vocation as St. Paul says (Rom. VIII, 30). God always goes before, says Bossuet. God must first speak to mankind and His teaching must reach everyone. The answer of man is faith, an act of reason and will by which, aided by grace, he freely bends his intellect to that great infallible Word. That, says the Council of Trent, is the beginning of justification, *initium et radix justificationis;* it is the clear spot in the cloudy sky by which man perceives the final purpose of his existence. It is not the vague trust of Protestants by which they believe in the remission of sins; this remission is an internal fact which God does not reveal to any person except by special privilege. It is not simply an aspiration towards the ideal, as some rationalists claim; it is not good will, though Bishop Freppel so contends: it is not a purely experimental and

scientific knowlege of God, arising from the consideration of His works.

All these things can facilitate the entrance of the soul into the supernatural order, but they are not sufficient to open the door. Before everything else, there must be an assent of our intellect given to the Word of God, to revelation presenting itself with all the marks of sovereign and infallible truth. Our faith, therefore, must be founded on God Himself, so that we can say: I believe, because God has spoken, or, as the Vatican Council declares: *Credo propter auctoritatem Dei revelantis.* Hence it follows that the act of faith is eminently reasonable.

Let us add that it is not necessary that revealed truth be proposed to man by the Church.

For children and the uneducated, the authority of God ordinarily is embodied in the authority of the parents or the priest who represents Him. Without being able to analyze their faith with the penetration of a theologian, these simple souls are aware that in their faith they are relying

upon God; it is easy to see, for instance, that they hear and accept the sayings of the catechism and sermons far otherwise than they credit the articles of a newspaper. Very often they give proof that their faith has its basis upon the indefectable rock which St. Thomas calls "*veritas prima*" and they show by the solidity of their convictions that the homage of their confidence goes higher than to man. A faith so unshaken is grounded on Him alone who in the words of the Vatican Council[1] can "neither deceive nor be deceived," "*nec falli nec fallere potest.*"

To what ought this faith necessary for salvation extend? At least to the elementary principles of Christianity. The supernatural training of the soul, as all education, ought to begin by the most simple religious truths which in germ contain all the others.

St. Paul (Heb. VI, 6) reduces those to two: the existence of God, and His Providence which will reward the good and punish the wicked. A precise idea of

[1] De fide catholica, ch. III.

these is not necessary. It is enough to believe in God who has put Himself in relation with mankind and in the reward which He has promised to all through the merits of the Saviour.

Such is faith under the most rudimentary form. But in this act of general faith the believer embraces all Christian truths, for in order to believe a truth, it is not necessary to have it always before the mind; it is sufficient when the teaching is not complete that assent be given to the principle which contains the whole.

The most ignorant Christian, therefore, believes in all Christian dogmas by the general disposition with which he accepts everything revealed by God, until, by instruction less summary, he can learn all the details.

Two dogmas, the Trinity and the Incarnation, have always been connected with the preceeding truths. It does not seem, however, that they are necessary in the same degree for elementary faith. Without belief in God and His Providence it is impossible to elicit an act of contrition

or charity, but such an act is possible without faith in the Trinity or Incarnation. The distinction, however, is more speculative than practical. The Church places an obligation on priests when they are giving the sacraments to the sick or the dying to instruct their penitents at least in these four truths, if they are able to receive any instruction whatever. Besides, the two fundamental dogmas have their concrete expression in the dogmas of Redemption, so that it is impossible to disjoin the former from the latter.

It may be useful to remark in conclusion that true faith in these fundamental truths may be associated with many errors in other points of doctrine. How many false ideas concerning God prevail among children and even among educated people! Nobody, however, would dare assert that these errors go so far as to destroy faith itself. Faith can co-exist even with idolatrous practices. It can happen, for instance, that the divinities of paganism be taken for the attributes of the true God, or for inferior powers depending on His

supreme authority. In these different cases faith in the essential truths can remain intact, in spite of the theoretical errors or practices which accompany it.

Certain moral dispositions are the spontaneous product of faith, just as the secrets revealed by one man to another produce between them an intimacy of esteem. The Council of Trent[1] enumerates these dispositions in detail. By the vision of the chastisement which will punish evil, faith usually produces a feeling of wholesome and efficacious fear; but in higher phases of the phenomenon, it immediately calls forth hope, love, a pious and confident expectation of eternal reward, and filial worship of the divine Being.

To these feelings will be added repentance for past faults and the firm will to conform to the divine ideal in the measure in which it is revealed. This conformity to the divine will must be manifested especially by the docile use of the means of regeneration and perseverance established by God and which we call sacraments.

[1] Sess. VI, ch. VI.

Two, especially, are necessary. Baptism, as evident from these words: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into that Kingdom of God" (John III, 5), and Penance, which the Master instituted in these words: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose you shall retain they are retained." (John XX, 20–3.)

But in case of impossibility to receive these sacraments good-will will suffice; for if they are as a rule indispensable for salvation, the necessity of them has its basis rather on the positive law than on the nature of things, and God who never demands the impossible accepts good-will as an equivalent. Hence the desire of baptism and penance is more necessary and important than these sacraments themselves. But you will say, this desire is a chimera; many persons have no idea of these means of salvation. How can they desire a thing which they do not know?

The answer is simple: for those ignorant of the existence of these sacraments, an implicite desire is sufficient, in other words

a desire contained in the general will of using the means willed by God.

Every day such phenomena appear in ordinary life. When we adhere to a principle, do we not at the same time admit the unseen consequences which proceed from it? Do we not accept ends whose means are yet unknown but to which we give assent? Every moment we desire to know or possess things which we know very vaguely.

Such is the preface of man's intercourse with God, such the beginning of that supernatural life which mankind will continue to lead in heaven and which as supermundane realities Holy Writ, attempting to translate in human language, pictures it to us under the popular image of a banquet and eternal feast.

Here we still recognize that religion "in spirit and truth" which subordinates exterior rites to internal mentality and attributes to the dispositions of the heart a preponderating role in the supernatural moralization of mankind.

Grace is necessary, not to suppress

human activity, but to stimulate and ennoble it; preparation for faith and sanctifying grace is an expenditure of moral energy, and those gifts of God have no other aim than to call forth from us a new display of activity and to give higher value to our deeds.

It is, therefore, false that the efforts of liberty are supplanted in Christian doctrine by the arbitrary caprice of God operating "through intuitive virtues which are just the opposite of the moral order." [1]

Liberty in the eyes of God is a thing so great and sacred that one of its deeds, produced with full freedom, can decide the eternal destiny of a human being and give to it its final orientation.

Is this "placing heaven on a bargain-counter" as Voltaire declared?

It has indeed been claimed that all that is necessary to be saved is to utter at the last moment the cry: "O my God!" But such a cry, you say, is raised nearly by every one, even by the degenerate. Whence it

[1] Revue philosophique, Août—Sept. 1901. La philosophie de la grâce par M. Récéjac.

must be concluded that nearly every one is assured of salvation.

While this cry can be purely instinctive and without any particular meaning, it can also be an act of religion and become the abridged expression of an act of love or perfect contrition. In such a case it will be the "eighth sacrament" mentioned by Bishop Bougard, which is freighted with the mercy of God to supply in necessity the place of those sacraments we cannot receive.

The laborer of the eleventh hour, the good thief on the Cross, or anyone who applies to himself the virtue of that cry, enters heaven in the train of the Divine Substitute, whose merits furnish whatever is lacking to gain eternal life.

CHAPTER V.

Application of the Means of Salvation.

In what measure are these conditions of salvation realized? What is the situation of men of the past and of the present in respect to these rules of Providence? It is impossible to answer with certainty these questions which depend only on the Supreme Judge of the human conscience. Let us try, nevertheless, to give some indications in the light of theology and history.

Christianity was born with the promise of the Redeemer, made to the first man, and so the Christian idea shines at the summit of the history of the world and the Church is truly "the beginning of all things."

Faith infused, then, at the cradle of the human race was transmitted by the oral tradition of the patriarchs and religious

society: it was the ordinary vehicle of the sacred deposit.

In spite of the idolatry and corruption of morals which soon sprang up, we may believe that essential truth remained intact in the souls of many peoples, and that the practices necessary for salvation continued to be performed. The more so, because messengers of God seem to have received the mission continually to arouse faith and maintain its integrity.

Besides, this faith was fixed, as in a concrete and immutable formulary, in a few, simple external rites, the purpose of which was to make faith manifest and preserve it. Hence during the period which preceded the written law, the conditions of salvation appear to have been widely realized, despite the prevailing disorders which the Bible recognizes as heinous.

The Mosaic legislation gave a fruitful expansion to the truths held in germ in the primitive revelation. At the same time it became a means of preservation against idolatry: the Hebrew people, notwithstanding their sublime vocation as precursors,

were gross and sensual; they were like those uncultivated minds, of whom Taine speaks in his History of English Literature, "who always need to grasp forms." So the divine Educator multiplied the exterior acts of worship in the sacrifices and the purifications; but the same idea appears under this seeming complexity; under these manifold and diverse rites we feel the promised Messiah palpitating in the heart of the chosen people, the Saviour whose future merits are already the salvation of those who hope in Him. And Providence, which was preparing His cradle, watched with a paternal care over those who were to be the ancestors of Christ. Prophets and thaumaturgists, prosperity and disaster, each in turn recalling the people of God to their duty, facilitated the salvation of souls of good-will.

As to other people, they kept the vestiges of the primitive revelation which had penetrated everywhere. More than once, indeed, only a formless debris remained; but the excrescences which disfigured the

revealed truth did not destroy it entirely; and everywhere, in the oldest historical epochs, we find a certain knowledge of the unity of God, of the moral law and the immortality of the soul.

They had, moreover, the interior grace which never is lacking to any person; they had also the spectacle of nature and the divine works. So, according to Holy Writ (Act XIV, 16) "God never left Himself without testimony"; creatures reveal Him to every right conscience, for conscience, says Plato, is only "the shadow of Him who is."

Providence supplied other means to these people. The Hebrews were for their neighbors a focus of light and they seem to have received from God the mission to carry all over the Orient the torch of faith.

It is probable that the first sojourn of the Hebrew people in Egypt produced a real influence on the religion of that country and, therefore, on Greek philosophers who borrowed ideas from the Egyptian priests. How the wonderful history of the

people of God must have thus resounded in the history and religious systems of other peoples!

During the captivity, the Jews were able to impart a knowledge of the true God to their victors. Then they became free, they dispersed everywhere, carrying with them the monotheistic and messianic idea. So darkness was not so deep on the world before Christ; in every sense it was pierced by the light of revelation. Despite this fact, we must acknowledge that in historical times we do not find pure monotheism in any nation. Everywhere it is disfigured by the reveries of pantheism, polytheism, dualism.

The Catholic Church was constituted by Christ as the depository of integral truth and the ordinary means of salvation. "Clothed with garments of light," says Bossuet, "with the baptized assembled about her, she occupies the bright summit to which mankind is called to ascend. But near and aside of her are other religious forms."

By the action of the devil, the separator,

says St. Augustine, dogma has been mutilated, the pieces of celestial Reason have been scattered and the members of the Word have been lacerated.

For, in all these sects there are fragments, sometimes majestic, of Catholic truth.

We find in the first place, the confessions of Christian denominations. Their adherents may have true faith based upon true motives, and, yet, so strong is the prejudice of education and custom that these Christians may not perceive the obligation to enter the Catholic Church. With this faith sufficient for salvation, they have preserved the use of some of the sacraments; the Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, for instance, hold to baptism. But their faith in this sacrament is so altered by several doctrinal errors, and, especially today, by a rationalistic spirit, that the Catholic Church is forced to doubt the validity of a baptism conferred by them.

Others, like the Oriental schismatics, have kept the sacrament of penance, the validity of which is assured at least at the

hour of death, since the Church gives to all priests validly ordained, jurisdiction over any penitent in danger of death.

Then, there are non-Christian sects, like the Jews and Mohammedans, which profess monotheism. The belief in the fundamental dogmas they have kept, has its basis upon traditional authority emanating from revelation; they may, therefore, possess the faith necessary for salvation and, also, the other dispositions required for justification. Unhappily the authority of revelation has been lessened in many minds; among many of the disciples of the Koran there is a deep perversion of the moral sense, and as to the Jews, everybody knows that many of them have faith rather in Mammon than in the God of Moses.

Finally, there are non-monotheistic sects, which do not believe in the true God: this kind of infidelity is spread as a funeral shroud over a considerable part of the globe. From the stand-point of religion, the people wrapt in that winding-sheet are the most disinherited of mankind. But their situation has more than one comfort-

ing thought. First of all, the preaching of missionaries has brought into the world the light of God, the reflection of which these infidels are able to perceive. Then, there prevails among them, through the superstition of their fetichism, the idea of a Superior Being who rewards the good and punishes the wicked. The first notions of the moral order are also found. Buddhism which seems so far away from Catholic truth, is not an exception. We may remark this also: it is not, as has been asserted, a material thing which the adepts of fetichism adore; it is rather the inferior genii, to whom God is supposed to entrust the government of the world. At a meeting of priests at Paris, January 11, 1899, Bishop Le Roy, superior of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, a missionary who spent many years in Africa, said: "It is stated that the savage adores a piece of wood, inasmuch as it is wood: that is false. The pagan kneels before a piece of wood, because he believes it to be influenced by supernatural power." As the savage cannot conceive spiritual beings, he

supposes them to be united more or less to material things."

It has been asked, how, from the two necessary truths, the existence of God who is infinitely just, these savages can have a faith truly divine — a faith based upon a revelation of which they have no idea.

First, we must admit that the best way for them to reach truth is more through instruction than by philosophizing. Then, it is natural that in religion they should believe what their ancestors believed, in other words, what they heard from their fathers. And the first origin of these religious notions, as Bishop Le Roy justly pointed out, is lost in a mystery which implies something divine, perhaps a revelation *proprie dicta* and direct intercourse of God with the first men: they believe because they have been told to do so, and finally, by a process of analysis, we discover that God is the true motive of their faith.

Let us suppose, now, that the supernatural is held not even in germ in certain more gross religions. Will God abandon the degraded beings who profess them?

"No," boldly aswers St. Thomas with all theological tradition, "God would rather send an angel to teach them what is necessary."

"A beautiful machine is this angel!" sneers the agnostic Rousseau. Nicolas understands better the idea of the angelical doctor: "This is a way," he says, "of expressing the goodness of God and the charity of the Catholic doctrine which conceives, rather a derogation to the laws of nature, than the loss of any creature of good-will."

Indeed let us suppose a man of right, honest conscience who observes to the best of his ability with the ordinary helps of God, the precepts of the natural law, as he knows it. Missionaries tell us such souls exist; some are found who have never heard anybody speak of the true God, yet they seem to have divined Him and almost loved Him. Has not the heart sometimes its intuitions and revelations?

These souls do not oppose any obstacle to grace. Without ever having done anything to deserve grace, which is absolutely

gratuitous, they, nevertheless, offer to it a good soil. For, if God knows how to turn an obstacle into a means and lever and to find even in our sins an occasion to manifest His mercy, oftener He adapts the action of His grace to the condition of the men whom He wishes to draw to Himself.

Gross as they are, the few religious ideas according to which infidels live, are as a remote preparation for the full truth. Before being Christians, by the fact that they are obedient to the voice of conscience, they are already the disciples of the Eternal Word who, first, is Sovereign Reason reflected in every intellect and revealed to everyman by the light of natural reason, and who then appears under the traits of the God-Man. God is, therefore, obliged to come to their assistance and to cause the star to rise which will lead them to their destiny — to the light of faith and the bosom of the true Church.

Assuredly He can send an angel to them. Does not St. Paul say (Heb. I, 14): "Are they (angels) not all ministering spirits,

sent to minister for them, who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?"

God can, also, act directly upon the hearts and minds of pagans and make that flash of lightning called grace, shine into their eyes. Is He not the focus to which every intellect directs its light?

Fénélon happily describes this work of grace: "I believe with St. Augustine that God then gives a first germ of secret, intimate grace which blends imperceptibly with reason and prepares man to go little by little from reason to faith." It is what St. Augustine calls: "*inchoationes quaedam fidei conceptionibus similes*" — a rough draft of faith under the form of a thought. God blends the beginnings of a supernatural gift with the residue of a good nature.

Sometimes, therefore, grace takes the form of a thought purely subjective and of a fact exclusively psychological: by means of the "sense of the divine" which is at the summit of every intelligence, the soul opens itself to the action of God. "Happy the ears," says the *Imitation of Christ*, "which perceive the undulations of this

divine murmur!" Happy are they who hear that luminous language which God speaks in the depth of conscience and which Bossuet calls "the occult and particular insinuations of truth."

Again and more frequently, grace wraps itself in exterior circumstances which are so many messengers of Providence. The history of grace shows us remarkable examples of this; St. Augustine was attracted by a book, the Magi by a star, the Apostles by fishing, and in the last century grace, by many exterior means, made famous conquests which are not yet forgotten.

The work thus begun within by grace, God completes by the ministers of His Church — in this way St. Peter was sent miraculously to the centurion Cornelius (Act. X) and St. Paul to the Macedonians.

The forms which grace takes, therefore, are manifold and diverse, but the result is always the same, it is the sublime ascent of the soul, which having been touched to the quick, goes little by little towards

those mysterious, eternal heights whose dawn the first lights of faith had already presented.

CHAPTER VI.

The Number of the Elect.

On the number of the elect our Lord has not enlightened us. He was asked: "Are they few that are saved?" His answer was a counsel of practical life: "Try to enter by the narrow gate." The Church imitates this reserve; in one of her prayers she asserts that "only God knows the number of those who are to inhabit the heavenly mansions"; she refuses to say that any man is lost. Indeed, it is only in the relatively few cases of beatification and canonization that she gives any decision on the lot of men in eternity.

Excommunication itself is not a sentence of damnation; it is a penalty by which the Church expels an obstinate sinner until he manifests better sentiments. But she has no intention of passing judgment on his interior dispositions, much less on his eternal destiny: *Ecclesia de internis non judicat.*

Sometimes excommunication follows the corpse, and the Church refuses public prayers to the impenitent sinner, but, even here, she wishes simply to stigmatize the memory of the deceased and so inspire in the faithful a greater horror of vice and evil.

It has been asserted that Holy Writ offers proof of the small number of the elect. To this end the text: "Many are called, few are chosen." is frequently brought forth,

This text so presented looks, indeed, very clear. But if you compare it with the context, the meaning seems different; the more so because the word ἔλεκτοι has not in the Bible the special meaning we attribute to it in current language.

The sentence ends the parable of the workmen called to the vineyard at the different hours of the day. "Few are chosen," the Master says, in other words, according to the meaning which seems the most plausible, few are the souls which go to God at the first hour: — all those who go to work, nevertheless receive a reward.

These words also follow the parable of the persons invited to the marriage feast, "Few are chosen;" that is to say, few are the souls which immediately accept the invitation; but those who defer their attendance, will still be able to go therein. In fact only one is excluded.

Other interpretations may be preferred, but the great number of modern commentators declare that the opinion which sees in the foregoing text a restriction on the number of the elect, has not great probability.

Father Janssens, a distinguished Roman theologian, writes: "*Fatendum est haec verba hoc sensu utrique parabolae non tam facile aptari.*" [1]

An argument is taken from another passage: "How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life and few there are who find it." [2] But the context seems to prove that these words are spoken only of the Jews who profitted so little from the teaching of Christ.

[1] De Deo, II, p. 496.
[2] Matt. VII, 13.

On the other hand many authors see in the Gospel a proof that the great body of mankind will be saved. The elect, indeed, are compared to the good seed and the damned to the cockle. Moreover, in the nets of the fishermen the good fishes outnumber the bad: of three servants only one is punished.

Still it seems more just to say with Vigouroux: "No presumption as to the number of the elect can be based upon the evangelical parables." [1]

An effort has been made to confirm the thesis of the small number of the elect by an appeal to the figures drawn from the Old Testament. The family of Noah, for instance, alone escaping the flood, would be the image of the small number of the saved, but St. Peter [2] who recalls the fact, does not say a word which can refer to the number who will possess eternal life. His words: "Wherein a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water," evidently

[1] Dictionnaire de la Bible, art. Elu

[2] I. St. Peter III, 20.

afford no ground for restricting salvation to the minority of mankind.

Again, according to Isaias,[1] the elect will not be more numerous than grapes left on the vines after vintage and ears of corn remaining in the field after harvest; but the prophet is speaking of those only who will survive the devastation of Judea.

* * *

Catholic tradition on this mysterious question is far from being unanimous. In the third and fourth centuries it was generally believed that all Christians were saved. This opinion gained credit at first, because of the fervor of primitive Christians; then when morals became relaxed, guarantees of salvation which before were attributed to the sanctity of the faithful, were transferred to the baptismal character. This conception of salvation was not without analogy with that which sees an infallible sign of predestination in certain insignia such as the scapular or the habit of a religious order.[2]

[1] Isaias XVII and XXIV.

[2] Turmel, L'Eschatologie à la fin du IV. siècle, p. 32.

In his treatise *De fide et Operibus* St. Augustine fought energetically against this theory, which soon after vanished.

The Fathers who followed pronounced generally in favor of the opinion of the small number of the elect; but here we must remember the theological rules which guide us in the interpretation of their testimony.

The authority of the Fathers is sovereign when they agree in teaching that a point of doctrine is *de fide* and belongs to the deposit of revelalion. But if they assert a dogma and do not give it as revealed, their teaching is to be weighed only by the arguments which they advance and we may reject it for good reasons. So Leo XIII writes in his encyclical *Providentissimus:* "Neque ideo (interpres) viam sibi putet obstructam, quominus, ubi justa causa adfuerit, inquirendo et exponendo ultra procedat."

The Fathers, indeed, from passages of Holy Writ express themselves on the small number of the elect, but they do not propose their belief in this matter as the doc-

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trine of the Apostles or as belonging to the deposit of Revelation, and views opposed to theirs may be held without loss of orthodoxy. Still it is on Patristic teaching that the Jansenists based their "wild and savage theology" with its Christ narrow-armed and its heaven almost closed. Massillon also was an apostle of that theory of despair; but it should be remembered that he was preaching to the most corrupt court of the world. His eloquence does not prevent us from saying that he erected his thesis upon a sophism. He required innocence or heroic penance as an indispensable condition of salvation, when ordinary penance or repentance with the will to lead a better life is sufficient.

As to reasons *a priori* they afford no conclusion one way or the other. They are often based upon a false conception of salvation which sees the soul at stake in a struggle between Christ and the devil. The truth in salvation is a personal affair.

Whatever be the number of the elect, victory always belongs to Christ by the fact that He gives to every soul sufficient

and more than sufficient means of salvation. As to the wisdom of God that is beyond judgment, since He regulates liberty in such a way that life is always a reasonable trial.

* * *

You will say then that it is possible, aye probable that the greater number of men are saved.

But look at the word, from the summit of the Christian ideal. See how small a place the Church occupies which dares to call herself Catholic and presents herself as the necessary condition for salvation.

Almost 1,500,000,000 men people the earth; 500,000,000 at most profess Christianity, and scarcely half of this number are in the true Church.

Let us try, however, not to make even approximate estimates, but to give some principles of solution. First of all, if statistics are consulted, you find that at least one-third of the children die before the age of reason. None of them is condemned to hell: many are baptized either

by the Church, or by others not of the household of faith, who nevertheless validly administer the sacrament. The salvation of these children is assured, and as Lacordaire says: "They have won a happy eternity at the cost only of coming here below and smiling at their mother."

Regarding adults, many die before reaching the age of passions and so by an early death their salvation is less endangered. As to the others it must be confessed that the great majority live badly enough but when they are suspended on the edge of mortal existence, and they see the mystery of the hereafter coming to them, they prepare for death in a way sufficiently salutary.

Besides, grace in that extreme moment becomes more pressing: "The compassion of God for the dying," says Condren, "surpasses all human ideas." An outburst of the heart under the influence of grace may occur, and that possibly is enough for a man to fix his eternal destiny in that decisive instant.

Doubt has been entertained of the sin-

cerity of those conversions *in extremis*, because the dying who recover their health do not generally change their life. It is certain that many such conversions can inspire little confidence: we must recognize, however, that the actual dispositions of the heart, possibly good and sufficient is one thing, and future perseverance another. The experience of every day life confirms this distinction. Today we may make a most sincere act of contrition; tomorrow through infirmity we may fall, yet our fall is a consequence of human weakness and may not be attributed to insincerity of dispositions.

What must we think of the salvation of Christians separated from the Church? Beyond doubt the great number is in good faith. Shall we be able to make anybody believe that the Russian peasant kneeling before his icons is aware of the schism of which he is a victim? Did not Newman, notwithstanding the penetration of his mind and the purity of his life, live many years in anglicanism, without having, as he asserted, even a doubt of the legitimacy of this religion?

There is, however, a more distressing side to the situation of our separated brethren, — it is the absence of the many means of salvation, as the sacraments found in the true Church. It is impossible to know in what measure God compensates for this loss.

As to infidels, — God, as we have seen, does not abandon them. "The more a creature is injured by nature, the more he is loved, protected, cared for in secret by his mother, — this is a copy of God's mercy." This thought of Bishop Bougaud is a tender commentary on numerous texts by which the Bible declares that God is the best of Fathers for everyone of His creatures. Father Faber writes: "It is sweet to think of the web of love which God is hourly weaving round every soul He has created. The busy European, the silent Oriental, the venturous American, the gross Hottentot, the bewildered Australian. He comes to all. He has His own way with each, but with all it is a way of tenderness, forbearance and lavish generosity. If we could read the biography

of each of those souls we should see him winding invisible threads of light and love even around the ferocious idolator."[1]

God, we have said, can act directly on souls, instead of using the exterior apostolate. It will be objected that these private revelations are an extraordinary means, which God should employ only by exceptions.

I answer that this revelation is private only in respect to the subject since the truths which are proposed in this way to the unbaptized are a part of the official teaching of the Church. Moreover, this means is extraordinary only in relation to us, since it is the ordinary means for these people.

Is there any need to add that they will not be judged according to the Decalogue which they do not know, but according to the more elementary notions of the natural law such as murder, perjury, adultery, and that they will be punished for their sins less severely than Christians because they have had less light?

[1] The Creator and the creature, book III, ch. 2, p. 306.

To conclude let us acknowledge that too many elements are wanting to us to estimate the number of the elect. What do we know of the duration and future of the world? Perhaps we take the prologue for the play, perhaps we are only at the preface of the book wherein the annals of mankind are being recorded.

"Perhaps," says Monsabré,[1] "we are still haunted too much by those geocentric ideas which concentrate our attention on mankind and make us lose sight of the whole of creation. Crowds of angels, perhaps other creatures, now unknown, will come to increase the immense multitude of the elect. (Cf. Apoc. VII, 9.)

In fine we believe too willingly that the Church has no other open gate to Paradise but the one of our little Chapel. Our judgments are always incomplete and fragmentary; often they are only a counterfeiting of the judgments of God. The value of a human life does not depend upon its exterior conformity to the law and yet this side of the deeds of our breth-

[1] Conferences 1889, Le nombre des élus.

ren is the only one known to us with certainty; it does depend on intimate dispositions and on the good and evil which the intellect sees and the will wills. Yet in this domain what ignorance, what prejudices!

"It is certain," said Pius IX, the pope of the Syllabus, to the bishops assembled at Rome, December 9, 1854, "that the Church is the only arch of salvation. But it is necessary to hold equally as certain that an inculpable ignorance of the true religion does not constitute before God the smallest sin. Now who would be bold enough to fix the limits of this ignorance, especially on account of the manifold reasons of nations, countries, character and many other circumstances."

Did not Jesus Christ tell his disciples that while persecuting them some men would believe they were doing an act agreeable to God? And a modern apologist in the preface of his book[1] has been able to write with a great degree of likehood: "The

[1] Dictionnaire apologétique de l'Abbé Jangey. Preface p. IX.

great majority of the adversaries of Catholicity are in good faith."

Yet despite this ignorance what manly virtues prevail, particularly among the people in the stress of the hard work of the day! Devotion unto sacrifice, fidelity to their promised work, loyalty, frankness,—is not all this an admirable preparation to receive the action of grace?

The lines of Lamartine thus come spontaneously to the mind, —

"They have sinned but heaven is a gift,
They have suffered, beyond the grave 't is another innocence,
They have loved, the seal of pardon will be there."

Perhaps this is the reason why the saints whose heart so much resembled God's are of a benevolence that is wonderful and a mercy that is astonishing. May we not believe that justice and mercy growing up in them to a sublime degree, prevents them from changing their idea?

* * *

Whatever it be, we may assert it seems to us, that the Church has not adopted any particular opinion on the number of the elect.

In pointing out that the opinion usually admitted cannot be raised to certitude, we have used only a strict right while we are ready to accept on this or other points the sovereign judgment of the Church.

As to the conclusion to be drawn, it springs forth itself: there is a question more important than to know the number of the elect and the application of the means of salvation, and that is to know if we, ourselves, will be among the number of the elect,

Let us work until the evening of our day, to speak in the language of the Bible, sharing the confidence which must inspire in us a view of the easiness of the salvation offered to us by divine mercy: sharing also the fear of the frequent and always possible weakness of our will, remembering in view of the dreadful responsibilities which weigh upon us, the words of St. Paul: "With fear and trembling work out your salvation." (Philipp. XI, 12.)

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